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Verb-final clauses in spoken Estonian

1 Introduction

Estonian is generally considered to have a relatively free word order with the basic pattern being SVO (Tael 1988). Written Estonian is a so-called V2-language like Germanic languages, and similarly to German it also has verb-final clause types.

Usually, it has been said that verb-final word order is a feature of subordinated clauses but there are also some main clauses ending with a finite verb.

In present day Standard Estonian, a verb tends to be clause-final in the following cases (EKK: 432; Remmel 1963; Erelt 2003):

- questions starting with an interrogative particle (constituent interrogatives, see example 1)
- complement clauses starting with a question word (subordinated constituent interrogatives; example 2)
- relative clauses (example 3)
- temporal and conditional clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if' (example 4)
- negative clauses not starting with a subject (example 5)
- exclamations (example 6)
- subordinate clauses subordinated to a negative or interrogative main clause (example 7).

(1)

<i>Kes</i>	<i>meile</i>	<i>täna</i>	<i>külla</i>	<i>tuleb?</i>
who-NOM	we-ALL	today	village-ILL	come-PR-SG3

'Who is going to visit us today?'

(2)

<i>(Ta küsis)</i>	<i>kes</i>	<i>meile</i>	<i>täna</i>	<i>külla</i>	<i>tuleb</i>
(he asked)	who-NOM	we-ALL	today	village-ILL	come-PR-SG3

'He asked who was going to visit us today'

(3)

<i>Mees,</i>	<i>kes</i>	<i>meile</i>	<i>täna</i>	<i>külla</i>	<i>tuleb,</i>	(<i>on kuulus</i> <i>professor</i>)
man-	who-	we-	today	village-	come-PR-	(is a famous
NOM	NOM	ALL		ILL	SG3	professor)

'The man who's going to visit us today is a famous professor'

(4)

<i>Kui</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>meile</i>	<i>külla</i>	<i>tuleb,</i>	(<i>keeda kohvi</i>)
if/when	he/she-	we-	village-	come-PR-	(make some
	NOM	ALL	ILL	SG3	coffee)

'If/When he comes to visit us make some coffee'

(5)

<i>Täna</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>meile</i>	<i>külla</i>	<i>ei</i>	<i>tule</i>
today	he/she-NOM	we-ALL	village-ILL	not	come-NEG

'Today he won't come to visit us'

(6)

<i>Küll</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>täna</i>	<i>tuleb</i>
PART	he/she-NOM	today	come-PR-SG3

'He'll come today!'

(7)

<i>(Ta ei räägi nii</i>	<i>et</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ise</i>	<i>seda</i>	<i>näinud</i>	<i>oleks,</i>	<i>vaid</i>
<i>mitte</i>							...
<i>sellepärast,)</i>							
(He doesn't	that	he/she-	himself/	this-	see-	be-	but
speak like this)		NOM	herself-	PRT	PST-	CND-	
			NOM		PTCL	SG3	

'He doesn't speak like this because he's seen it himself but...'

Two possible explanations of the origin of such clauses have been offered. On the one hand, the verb-final clauses have been regarded as a relic of the older SOV word order which is characteristic of Finno-Ugric languages. Nowadays, such word order occurs in certain sentence types prevailing in subordinate clauses (Rommel 1963).

On the other hand, the verb-final clauses have been explained by German influence because the verb-final word order is characteristic of German subordinated clauses (Aavik 1912; Ehala 1998).

On the whole, the verb-finality is disappearing above all from subordinate

clauses, or at least, the number of verb-final clauses has decreased during the 20th century (see Ehala 1998; Käi 1997; figure 1).

* Data from spoken Estonian. V1 = verb-initial clauses, V2 = verb-second clauses, V3 = verb in the third position, VF = verb-final clauses.

On the one hand, this process has to do with the language innovation introduced by Johannes Aavik at the beginning of the 20th century (Ehala 1998), whereas on the other hand, we are probably witnessing the expansion of the more common SVO word order, which can be explained by language contacts as well as a broader typological change.

After the II World War, the number of verb-final embedded clauses has increased but not at the same level as it was in the beginning of the 20th century. In the figure 1, the data from spoken Estonian is shown (by Käi 1997).

The verb-finality does not disappear equally from all of these clause types. In the first half of the paper, I will compare the overall number of verb-final clauses in four clause types:

- questions starting with an interrogative particle (constituent interrogatives)
- embedded (subordinated) constituent interrogatives (complement clauses)
- relative clauses
- temporal and conditional clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if'.

In the second half of the paper, I will try to explain how and why the verb-final word order is disappearing from certain clause types (relative clauses) and why it stays in others (constituent interrogatives). For this purpose, I am going to analyse the informational status of constituents in interrogatives and relative clauses in terms of givenness and newness (using Prince's terminology, see Prince 1981, 1992), and in terms of topic and focus (Lambrecht 1994).

2 Data

The data used comes from the Tartu University Corpus of Spoken Estonian (see Hennoste et al. 2001).

Constituent interrogatives are used to inquire which values (if any) instantiate the variables of an open proposition (Siemund 2001). Interrogative words indicate which part of the proposition the inquirer is interested in knowing about (Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 185). Constituent interrogatives are main clauses.

In this paper I use the term 'constituent interrogatives' taken from Siemund (2001). Also terms such as information questions (Sadock & Zwicky 1985), variable questions (Huddleston 1994), information, special, *wh*-, partial and open interrogatives are used (see Siemund 2001). In Estonian linguistics, usually the term *eriküsilause* (special interrogative) is used (Metslang 1981, EKG II).

Constituent interrogatives come from the Tartu University Corpus of Spoken Estonian. All the analysed texts were taken from institutional conversations. Among these texts there were recordings of travel advice, phone calls to inquiry offices etc. As the aim of all these conversations was to get some kind of information, it was possible to find a lot of information questions in these texts. I have analysed 451 interrogative clauses.

Embedded constituent interrogatives are used as complement clauses: the notional sentence or predication is an argument of the predicate (Noonan 1985). They are subordinated to the main clause and function as an object, subject, predicative or dependent adverbial to their main clause.

Embedded constituent interrogatives come from everyday conversations. I have analysed a passage of text (about 1800 clauses) where the number of complement clauses was 157 but the number of subordinated complement clauses only 61.

Temporal and conditional clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if' are (subordinated) adverbial clauses. In Estonian, like in many other languages, there is no distinction between time and conditional clauses. I have analysed 96 adverbial clauses taken from the passage of everyday conversation. Out of these, 69 started with *kui* and conveyed the temporal or conditional background to the main clause.

Relative clauses are subordinated clauses which modify the NP of the main clause. Relative clauses come from everyday conversations; the number of analysed relative clauses was 95.

3 What is the connection between these four clause types?

At first sight, these four clause types seem to be quite different because their function is different. But they are formed in a similar way:

1. They all share verb-final word order, or at least, verb-final word order has been the statistically dominant word order in these clause types (see Ehala 1998 and figure 1).

2. They all start with an element which functions also as an interrogative word or a particle:

- interrogative particles of constituent interrogatives: *kes* 'who', *mis* 'what', *millal* 'when', *kus* 'where', *kuidas* 'how', etc., also interrogative phrases beginning with *kui* such as *kui palju* 'how many', *kui suur* 'how big' etc.
- embedded constituent interrogatives use the same particles
- relative clauses start usually with *kes* 'who' or *mis* 'what' (in all cases; for the choice of relative words see Erelt 1996)
- temporal and conditional clauses start with *kui* 'when, if'.

We can see that the four clause types under discussion have a similar

construction, starting with the relative-interrogative word/particle and ending with the finite verb. In all probability, the four clause types are historically of the same origin. It has been said that originally Estonian (and other Finno-Ugric languages) did not have any subordinated clauses beginning with a conjunction. These constructions are due to the Indo-European influence. In earlier Estonian, gerunds and participles were used instead.

Lehtinen has suggested that Estonian subordinated clauses have something to do with verb-final main clauses: they have similar information structure (Lehtinen 1992: 79–80). I am going to test this idea in the present paper.

4. Word order

In tables 1 to 4 it is shown how the clauses under consideration starting with an interrogative particle differ with respect to word order from other clauses of the same type. The comparison in the tables is carried out only between such clauses that consist of at least three constituents of sentence (subject, predicate, other).

Table 1 shows the position of the predicate in constituent interrogatives and yes/no questions.

Table 1. The position of the predicate in special questions starting interrogative particles, *kas*-questions and other general and alternative questions.

constituent interrogatives			<i>kas</i> -interrogatives (yes/no questions)			other yes/no questions		
Vi	0	0%	Vi	9	5%	Vi	36	22%
Vc	97	22%	Vc	149	78%	Vc	114	70%
Vf	345	78%	Vf	34	18%	Vf	13	8%
Total	442			192			163	

We can see that the position of the predicate in constituent interrogatives is totally different from that in yes/no questions: 78% of constituent interrogatives are verb-final while yes/no questions are mostly verb-central (70–78%).

Table 2. The position of the predicate in embedded constituent interrogatives and other types of complement clauses.

	<i>et</i> 'that'		embedded constituent interrogatives		<i>kui</i> 'when, if'	
Vi	2	2%	1	2%	0	0%
Vc	76	84%	22	36%	3	50%
Vf	12	13%	38	62%	3	50%
Total	90		61		6	

In the case of complement clauses we can see a similar principal difference between questions starting with *et* 'that' and embedded constituent interrogatives. In questions starting with *et*, the predicate is normally in the middle of the clause (in 84% of the clauses) whereas in embedded constituent interrogatives it is in the clause-final position (62%).

Table 3. The position of the predicate in adverbial clauses.

	<i>kui</i> 'if, when'		<i>et</i> 'that'		<i>sest</i> 'because'		question word	
Vi	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%
Vc	35	51%	8	73%	11	79%	1	50%
Vf	34	49%	2	18%	3	21%	1	50%
Total	69		11		14		2	

Although there were few other types of adverbial clauses in the data, one cannot but notice those starting with *kui* 'when, if'. Half of these are verb-final. It is possible that the same can be said about adverbial clauses starting with question words (e.g. *kus* 'where') but there were too few of those in the analysed material in order to draw any conclusions.

Table 4. The position of the predicate in relative clauses.

Vi	0	0%
Vc	55	58%
Vf	40	42%
Total	95	

From the table 4 reveals that in more than half of relative clauses (58%) the predicate occurs somewhere in the middle of the clause and only 42% of relative

clauses are verb-final.

In conclusion we can say that in the material analysed for the present purposes, verb-finality was commonest in the case of constituent interrogatives (78%), followed by embedded constituent interrogatives (62%), and adverbial clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if' (49%). Relative clauses contained the smallest proportion of verb-final clauses (42%).

5 Information structure of constituent interrogatives and relative clauses

In the second half of this paper I will analyse two types of clauses: constituent interrogatives and relative clauses. These two clause types differed most with respect to the percentage of verb-final clauses. I will discuss the informational status of constituents in terms of givenness and newness and compare the clause types in terms of focus position.

5.1 Givenness-newness

In this section, I am going to analyse the informational status of preverbal and postverbal elements. The aim is to find out whether the order of constituents depends on the information structure.

I will be using the following categories: given information, new information and inferrable/messy information. These categories are taken from Prince (1981, 1992) who has defined them as follows:

In the case of **new entities** the speaker first introduces an entity into the discourse. There are two types of new entities:

- brand-new: the hearer has to create a new entity
- unused: the hearer has a corresponding entity in his/her own model and simply places it in the discourse-model; the entity is not mentioned before in this discourse.

Given (evoked) entities consist of an NP whose entity is already in the discourse-model. There are also two types:

- textually evoked – mentioned before
- situationally evoked: discourse participants, salient features of extralingual context.

In the case of **inferrable entities** the speaker assumes that the hearer can infer this entity via logical or plausible reasoning, from discourse entities already evoked or from other inferrables. (Prince 1981: 235–237.)

I have analysed the informational status of elements in a given discourse only on the basis of previous text and situation. This is also the reason why I have added the term 'messy' to the category 'inferrable' as sometimes it is not possible to say anything about the newness or givenness of the referents because the taped passage of the dialogue is too short. The referents seem to be familiar

to the participants but there is no way of proving this because they are not mentioned in the available part of the discourse.

Table 5. Information status of preverbal elements of constituent interrogatives (CI) and relative clauses (RC).

word order pattern *	clause type	given N, %	inferrable/ messy N, %	new N, %
<u>XS(X)V</u>	CI	245 (86%)	20 (7%)	21 (7%)
	RC	19 (86%)	3 (14%)	0
<u>SXV</u>	CI	63 (89%)	0	6 (11%)
	RC	13 (59%)	7	2
<u>XVS(X)</u>	CI	6 (15%)	10	24 (60%)
	RC	0	0	11 (100%)
<u>SVX</u>	CI	3	0	2
	RC	5 (16%)	0	14 (74%)
<u>XSVX</u> , <u>SXVX</u>	CI	31 (61%)	9	11 (22%)
	RC	4	5	9 (50%)

* analysed constituent is underlined

It can be seen from table 5 that in most cases the preverbal subject of constituent interrogatives carries given information (example 8, in table 5 XS(X)V order), and that the same goes for the preverbal other element in interrogatives (SXV order, example 9). In relative clauses there are more messy cases.

(8)

ee mis firmade reise te muidu veel pakute.¹
 um what- firm-PL- trip-PL- you- PART else offer-PR-
 NOM GEN PRT NOM PL2

‘what other agencies’ trips do you offer’

(9)

ee mis `kuupäeva reis teid `huvitab.
 um what date-GEN trip-NOM you-PRT interest-SG3

‘which date’s trip you are interested in?’

¹ In the following examples the analysed constituent is underlined.

But what is more interesting is what happens after the verb. The post-verbal subject (in table 5 XVS order) in relative clauses always contains new information (example 10), and in interrogatives the percentage of new information is only 60. The broader function of such word order (in declarative sentences) is to introduce new referents.

(10)

(seal `sinu kõrval kus on `tööriideid ja kõrva`klappe ja
on to üks
mingisugune (.)
`superpood)
(there beside you is where be- working- and headphone- and
a some kind of PR- clothes-PL- PL-PRT
superstore) SG3 PRT
'there beside you is a some kind of superstore where there are working clothes
and headphones and'

In utterances with the SVX word order the post-verbal element in relative clauses carries mainly new information (74%, example 11) whereas in interrogatives the information is both new (example 12) and given (example 13).

(11)

(sa od nagu kes püab `sisse saada nagu `maffiaperekonda
mingi (0.8)
`salaagent)
(you are like a who- try- in get- PAR mafia-family-ILL
secret agent) NOM PR- INF T
SG3
'you are like a secret agent who is trying to get in to a mafia family'

(12)

`missugused bussid lähevad `homme `Tartust `Mellistesse
what-kind-of-PL- bus-PL- go-PR- tomorrow Tartu- Melliste-
NOM NOM PL3 ELA ILL
'what buses will go tomorrow from Tartu to Melliste'

(13)

ja umbes mitu `kraadi võiks seal olla
and about how-many degree-PRT can-CND-PR-SG3 there be-INF
'and about how many degrees could there be'

In relative clauses with XSVX and SXVX word order, the post-verbal information is new in 50% of the cases (example 14) whereas in interrogatives it is mainly given (61%, example 15).

(14)

(see oli kus Eldor Valter `jõle hästi mängis `joodikut
vist

kuskil

`teises

tükis)

(it was where Eldor- Valter- awfully well play- drunkard-
probably NOM NOM IPF- PRT

in some SG3

another

play)

'where Eldor Valter awfully well played a drunkard'

(15)

mis `kellast te olete seal

what time-ELA you-NOM be-PR-PL2 there

'since what time will you be there'

The conclusion that can be drawn from the table 5 is that the word order in relative clauses is more sensitive to the information structure, i.e. the new element is more frequently placed at the end of the sentence than in interrogatives.

5.2 Focus position

Why are relative clauses more sensitive to the information structure than constituent interrogatives? In the next discussion I am going to show that the reason could lie in the focus position of different clause types.

In the previous section, the first element of the clause, the interrogative-relative word, was not analysed. In this section, I will look at the focus position of the clause (presupposition) and analyse the status of the interrogative-relative word in the beginning of the clause.

The term **focus** has many definitions. Here, I will be using the definition suggested by Lambrecht (1994: 207): „The focus of the proposition expressed by a sentence in a given utterance context is seen as the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion DIFFER from each other. The focus is that portion of a proposition which cannot be taken for granted at the time of speech. It is the UNPREDICTABLE or pragmatically NON-

RECOVERABLE element in an utterance.”

In constituent interrogatives, the interrogative words mark the interrogated part of the proposition and are the focus of the proposition. Constituent interrogatives present the rest of the proposition as old or presupposed information (Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 185).

Lambrecht differentiates between **marked** and **unmarked narrow focus**. The position of the unmarked narrow focus in languages like English is the final position of the core which may or may not be the final position of the clause. The marked narrow focus is the **contrastive focus** and it occurs somewhere else (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 209).

In many languages (like English or Estonian), the usual place for interrogative words is at the beginning of the clause/sentence. In these languages, this is also a usual place for focus and topic (in terms of Lambrecht, marked narrow focus). In languages with distinct positions for topic and focus (like Hungarian where the topic is clause-initial but focus stands immediately before the verb), the interrogative is in the position of the focus (Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 185).

In Estonian, the usual position for the unmarked narrow focus is also at the end of the clause (Tael 1988: 40), and the usual place for the contrastive focus (in Lambrecht's terminology, marked narrow focus) is at the beginning of the clause (Tael 1990: 35). The most usual position for interrogative words of constituent interrogatives is the clause-initial (or sentence-initial) position (see examples 16–17)

(16)

`mis kell lähevad bussid `Tartusse.
what-NOM time-NOM go-PR-PL3 bus-PL-NOM Tartu-ILL
'what time will go buses to Tartu'

(17)

ja `millal seda vaja `oleks
and when this-PRT need-CND-SG3
'and when will you need it'

In spoken Estonian, there are exceptions to this rule (see example 18) but they are relatively rare and they are not discussed in this paper.

(18)

Caller: *tere `õhtust. sooviksin teada `Tallinasse sõitvaid ekspressbusside
`aegu kuskil kella kuue `seitsme ajal. (...)*

'Good evening. I would like to know the times of the express
buses going to Tallinn around six seven o'clock.'

Answerer: *ee seitseteist `viiskümnend ekspress, (.) kaheksateist kakskümnend
`kiirliin, (0.5) kaeksateist viis`kümnend ekspress, (0.5) öheksateist
null `null ekspress.*

'eh seventeen fifteen express, eighteen twenty fast coach, eighteen
fifty express, nineteen o'clock express.'

→ Caller: *ja `järgmine tuleb sis millal*
and next- come- then when
NOM PR-SG3

'and when the next one comes'

Answerer: *öheksateist kolm`kümnend.*
'nineteen thirty'

We can conclude that in Estonian (like in many languages), the usual position of the interrogative word of constituent interrogatives is the focus position at the beginning of the clause.

The placing of the focus at the beginning of the sentence does not entail that it is the only element in that utterance (proposition) that contains new information. In example 19, there are several elements containing new information (*Rakvere* 'to Rakvere'; *kaheteist ja kolme vahel* 'between twelve and three'), but the focus of the question is still *millal* 'when', because the enquirer needs to know the exact leaving time of the buses to Rakvere.

(19)

milla	lähevad	täna	bussid	`Rakvere	umbes	e	`kaheteist
l							
when	go-PR- PL3	today	bus-PL- NOM	Rakvere- ILL	about	um	twelve- GEN
		ja	`kolme	vahel.			
		and	three- GEN	between			

'when go buses to Rakvere today between twelve and three'

In example 20, the new element is *sõit* 'journey' which is also prosodically marked but it is not a focus but more like a topic (i.e. what the clause is about). The focus of the question is *kui palju* 'how long'.

(20)

ja	kui	palju	see	õõ	`sõit	kestaks	sinna	Slo`vakiasse.
and	how	much	this-	um	journey-	last-	there	Slovakia-ILL
			NOM		NOM	CND-		
						PR-SG3		

'and how long this journey would take to Slovakia'

In relative clauses, the focus is not on the first element (relative-interrogative pronoun) of the relative clause but somewhere else. The focus can be on the NP that is complemented by the relative clause, or on the NP as well on the following relative clause.

In the analysed relative clauses, the NP that is complemented by the relative clause is almost always the focus of the preceding clause, and also the focus of the whole sentence. Example 21 presents a question-answer pair. The focus of the question is *keda* 'whom' (it is also prosodically stressed), and the focus of the answer is *seda* 'this' that is followed by a relative clause which explains what 'this' refers to: *seda mis sin taldriku peal on* 'this what here on the plate is'. The word *mis* 'what' is a relative pronoun, and the focus of the relative clause is the phrase *taldriku peal* 'on the plate'. The focus of the whole sentence (i.e. the focus of the whole turn) is the word *seda* 'this'.

(21)

A: hehe ((lõbus naer)) `keda sa püüad. hehe
 haha ((merry laugh)) who-PRT you-NOM catch-PR-SG2 haha
 'haha who are you catching. ha ha'

M: `seda mis sin `taldriku peal on.
 this-PRT what-NOM here plate-GEN on be-PR-SG3
 'this what here on the plate is'

In the following example 22, the utterance could be divided into two. In the first half (NP *see pilt* 'this picture' + the relative clause *mis ma seal tegin* 'that I made there'), the NP, complemented by the relative clause, is focused. In the second half, the focus is on *ära viima* 'to take away'.

(22)

nh	see	`pilt	mis	ma	seal	tegin,	`see
PART	this-	photo-NOM	what	I-NOM	there	do-	this-GEN
	NOM					IPF	SG1
		peaks	ära	viima.			
		must-CND-	away	take-			
		SG3		SUP			

'well this photo that I made there, this should be taken away'

All the preceding examples were about restrictive relative clauses but example 23 shows a non-restrictive relative clause. Even here the focus is on the NP complemented by the relative clause (*korter kallis* 'expensive flat'). Within the relative clause the focus is on the word *kallim* 'more expensive'.

(23)

(tal on	`korter	kallis	mis	on	`kallim	kui	see
omal)							
(he	flat-	expensive-	what-	is	expensive-	than	this-
himself	NOM	NOM	NOM		CMP-NOM		NOM
has)							
		`maja	ja.				
		house-NOM	and				

'he himself has an expensive flat that is more expensive than this house and'

However, it is not always the case that the focus of the sentence or clause lies on the NP that is complemented by the relative clause. In example 24 the relative clause is complementing the pronoun *mina* 'I' but the focus is on the NP *stagnant* 'stagnant' that has the predicative function. The reason why the speaker is considered to be stagnant is conveyed by the relative clause where the focus lies on *ei olnd nõus* 'didn't agree'.

(24)

jah	ja	mina	olen	ka	nüid	stag`nant	eksole	kes
	ma	I	olnd	`nõus.				
yes	and	I-NOM	be-SG1	also	now	stagnant-NOM	PART	who-
NOM	I-NOM		not	be-PST-PTCL	willing			

'and I am now also stagnant, am I not, who I didn't agree'

Also, in example 25, the focus is not on that NP where the relative clause belongs but on the sentence initial *mitte keegi* 'no-one'. The relative clause itself does not contain any new elements, and the focus can be considered to lie on the

(25)

'no one remembered our Kāgu ('cuckoo') who cuckoo-ed the school open'

Relative pronoun is a grammaticalised connective that also functions as constituent of the relative clause. In principle such element can in exceptional cases be in the focus of the clause. However, in the data only one example could be found where it is possible to say that it functions as the focus of the clause (example 26). But as this sentence did not contain an NP, which the relative clause would complement and which on the whole is the focus of the utterances containing relative clauses, such relative clause is more similar to an interrogative sentence than to the so called normal relative clause.

(26)

et kellel `paha hakkas, oli `isa.
that who-ADE bad-NOM become-IPF-SG3 be-IPF-SG3 father-NOM
'that who was sick was the father'

The relative interrogative pronoun is almost always after the NP that it relativizes, and therefore its function as an anaphoric pronoun is not too

important. Rather it is a purely grammatical unit that joins two clauses, i.e. it functions as a connective. The relative interrogative pronoun is never stressed in the utterance. This is expected because grammatical words are normally unstressed. Stress is above all characteristic of the focus.

6. Temporal and conditional clauses starting with *kui*

The percentage of verb-final clauses in *kui*-conditional and temporal clauses was rather similar to that in the relative clauses: 49. If we try to analyse the topic position and the status of the clause initial element (*kui~ku* 'when, if') in conditionals we can see that they are rather similar to relative clauses, too. The clause-initial element (*kui*) is a conjunction. It is almost never prosodically marked and is never the focussed element in the clause or overall sentence (examples 27–28).

(27)

ku	`rohkem	lahti	on	(sis kukub `tagant ära)
if	more	open	be-PR-SG3	(then it falls off)
'if it is more open then it falls off'				

(28)

(a see oli	kui	sul	`oli	see	tunne	viimati	(eksole
ikkagi viis							nagu ma
kuus							aru
aastat							saan)
`tagasi)							
(but it	when	you-	be-	this-	feeling-NOM		
was five		ADE	IPF-	NOM	PART (wasn't		
six years			SG3		it as I		
ago)					understand)		
'but it was five six years ago when you last had this feeling, wasn't it as I understand'							

7. Embedded constituent interrogatives

Embedded constituent interrogatives are complement clauses. Their function in discourse varies a lot.

In examples 29 and 30, embedded constituent interrogatives form a question. The main clause to which the complement clause is subordinated is only formally the main clause; the main content of the sentence is conveyed by the complement clause. In example 29, the main clause is *huvitav* 'it is interesting';

in example 30, the speaker comments that she did not understand and asks *kes on halb inimene* 'who is the bad person'.

(29)

aga	`huvitav	kui	kaua	see	Lasnamäe	ikkagi	vastu
but	interesting-	how	long	this-	Lasnamäe-	PART	out
	NOM			NOM	NOM		
			`peab.				
			hold-PR-				
			SG3				

'but it is interesting how long this Lasnamäe will last'

(30)

(ota ma ei saand nüüd `aru,)	`kes	on	halb	inimene.
(wait, I could not	who-	be-PR-	bad-	person-
understand)	NOM	SG3	NOM	NOM

'wait, I could not understand who the bad person is'

In both cases, the relative-interrogative word or phrase is focused. Even if the complement clause does not convey a question, the interrogative word or phrase is focused (see examples 31–32).

(31)

(`mina mõtlesin näiteks	mis	võiks	e	`rebastele	teha.
`välja)					
(I thought out for	what-	can-CND-	um	fox-PL-	do-
example)	PRT	SG3		ALL	INF

'I came to the conclusion what for example we could do for the foxes (greenhorns)'

(32)

vaata	kui	ilusti	Kõuts	`küsi.
look-IMP-PR-SG2	how	nicely	Kõuts-NOM	ask-PR-SG3

'look how nicely Kõuts is asking'

However, there are cases where it is hard to say whether the interrogative word is focused or not. In example 33, the speaker is talking about a performance she saw the night before on TV. She is referring to what happened and what the main character was doing and what she said. Here the interrogative word seems to be unfocused, it is similar to relative words in relative clauses and it is very easily exchangeable with *et* 'that' which functions only as a conjunction and is

never focused.

(33)

(sis rääkis)	kuidas	see	`mees	käis	seal	siis	`korteris
(then she was talking)	how	this- NOM	man- NOM	go- IPF- SG3	there	then	flat-INE
		umbes about	ja and				

'then she was talking how this man went there to that flat and'

We can conclude that the subordinated constituent interrogatives are with respect to the position of argument focus very similar to the main constituent interrogatives: the interrogative word is usually focused. But there are cases (like example 33) where the interrogative word seems to be unfocused and more similar to conjunctions. It may be the reason why there are less verb final clauses among the embedded constituent interrogatives than among the main constituent interrogatives.

8 Conclusion

Estonian is a relatively free word order language. This means that the order of constituents within clause/sentences depends less on syntactic and mainly on pragmatic factors. A very important factor affecting the word order is the information structure.

This paper compared four clause types (taken from spoken Estonian) which are constructed similarly but the word order of which is varying largely: questions starting with an interrogative particle (constituent interrogatives), embedded constituent interrogatives (complement clauses), relative clauses, and temporal and conditional clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if'. All these clause types start with a relative-interrogative word and all of them have earlier had a verb-final word order. Nowadays, in spoken Estonian (on the bases of Tartu University Corpus of Spoken Estonian), the number of verb-final clauses in these clause types is very different: verb-finality was the commonest in the case of constituent interrogatives (78%), followed by embedded constituent interrogatives (62%), and adverbial clauses starting with *kui* 'when/if' (49%). Relative clauses contained the smallest percentage of verb-final clauses (42%).

I suggest that the reason for such a variation lies in the focus position. In constituent interrogatives, the interrogative word or phrase at the beginning of the clause is always focused. Embedded constituent interrogatives are very

similar to main interrogatives but there were few cases when the interrogative word was not focused and was more similar to conjunctions (which usually do not carry any focus). Adverbial clauses starting with *kui* 'when, if' and relative clauses showed the smallest number of verb-final clauses. They are similar with respect to the focus position as well: the relative-interrogative word at the beginning of the clause is never (or almost never) focused, and so the information structure of „normal” (declarative) main clauses can be used.

Nevertheless there is still a large number of *kui*-clauses and relative clauses ending with a finite verb. It is probable that the language change has not finished but is going on. The analysis of the givenness and newness of the constituents in relative clauses showed that if there are only given elements in the relative clause, the verb-final word order is used. In constituent interrogatives, the verb-finality was not so strongly correlated with givenness-newness. It seems that the sensitivity to givenness-newness depends on the focus structure: if the first element (interrogative-relative word) is focused, the givenness-newness of the constituents does not affect the word order in the way it does in the so called normal declarative main clauses.

Transcription conventions

- (.) short interval (max 0.2 sec)
- (...) longer interval
- (0.5) timed interval
- ` stressed word or syllable
- . falling intonation
- , fall not to low
- ((text)) comment

Abbreviations

- S subject
- V predicate
- X other constituent (one or more): object, adverbial or predicative
- Vi verb initial word order
- Vc verb central word order
- Vf verb final word order

Glossing

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------|------|-----------------|
| ADE | adessive case | NEG | negative |
| ALL | allative case | NOM | nominative case |
| CMP | comparative | PART | particle |
| CND | conditional | PL | plural |
| ELA | elative case | PR | praesens |

GEN	genitive case	PRT	partitive case
ILL	illative case	PST	past tense
IMP	imperative	PTCL	participle
INE	inessive case	SG	singular
INF	infinitive	SUP	supinum
IPF	imperfect	TRA	translative case

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